**Day 1**

We have arrived!  It was an uneventful trip down with only a short layover in Charlotte.  The excitement began, as usual, when we arrived at customs in Punta Cana.  Sue and Pastor Joel had done a lot of work to make sure all of the appropriate paperwork was completed but part of the process was that a medical official needed to review all incoming medicine.  Apparently no one mentioned to Pastor Joel that a local medical official had not been appointed to this region yet so after a long wait we were able to get approved through by an official of some sort.

All of the bags and team headed to the hotel while Ernie and Wilson went to buy some cheap local phones.  The adjustment to "Dominican Time" started to sink in when our team meeting at 5pm turned into 7pm by the time Wilson, Ernie and Pastor Joel made it back.  In the mean time a made a lot of progress was made organizing the bags in Sue and Ray's room, with 18 bags they are going to have a hard time finding space to sleep.

Once the whole team was together a plan for the next few days was developed.  Everyone will stay together tomorrow and prepare for the work at Pastor Joel’s while trying to finalize pricing using Wilson's contacts. Prayers that God will guide and protect us as we begin our work.

It is amazing how well the new members of the mission are fitting in with the veterans, spirits are high and everyone is excited to get started.

**Day 2**

The morning started off with breakfast and a prayer at 8am where everyone grabbed a little something extra for Wilson (he appreciated everything other then the squashed peanut butter and banana sandwich...).  The plan was to split up into two teams with some going to buy building supplies with Wilson and the rest would stay back and organize and pack the donations. At just about the time Wilson was supposed to pick us up, we received a call from him to tell us his van broke down. While he made his way to La Romana to get a different van for us to use, we all spent the time organizing the many donations.

With our supplies fully organized and packed we piled into the new van (big enough for all of us!) and were on our way to Pastor Joel's house.  As we were getting out of the van, Jen looked up just in time to see Pastor Joel's youngest son Davey running at her for a hug.  Elizabeth gave us a tour of what we were going to be working on and surprised us with a lunch of rice and chicken.  Pastor Joel's friend Hector arrived shortly after to take command as the site manager for our project.

Once a shopping list was finalized we piled back in the van and headed to the hardware store to let Wilson work his magic and get us what we need at the lowest price.  He did not disappoint. He was able to get the bill down from the original estimate of $3,000 to $1,250! Praise God for our Dominican friends.

Back at Pastor Joel's house we were able to spend some time playing with Christopher and Davey who were excited to show us some Youtube videos of games.  Ben, Ernie and Wilson walked down to the local wireless store to find the best deal on the internet accsess we have been providing them with.  The language barrier was beginning to be an issue with the employee, but Ben was able to come to the rescue with a translation of "Bonus Points" that explained why they were going to give us such a discount The rain picked up on our way to the hotel so we were grateful to be heading back.  Tomorrow will be the first day of construction for half of the group and a trip to some of the schools and clinics with the other half.

Day 3 [Blocks, Beads, Scorpions Oh My!](http://www.lohmission.org/our-trips/2013-january-trip/day-3)

Wilson was early!  We managed to get all the way to Pastor Joel's before 9:30am.  Our site foreman Hector was already hard at work so the A-Team (Scott, Ernie, Jen, Helen & Ben) jumped in to start moving concrete blocks to the roof. There were 325 blocks (estimated 40ish lbs each) to carry around the house and up the stairs. We quickly formed a "bucket brigade" and sent enough blocks up the stairs for Hector to place on the walls. Once that first step was done, there was a break in the action. Sue had decided the day before that

if there was any down time then we should make a garden for Elizabeth in the area near the entrance to the back yard.  Because Hector and his friend were such good workers A-Team found themselves with enough time to clean out the area and arranged for fill and topsoil to be delivered.

It was during the cleaning of the garden area that Jen and Helen were surprised by a 5 inch scorpion that ran out from under a rock.  One of the local kids did not hesitate to come to the rescue by stomping on the bug with his flip-flop.  Soon after the fill arrived we realized it was far rockier than expected, so moving the fill turned into a big project.  Scott and Ben were surprised to find how seamlessly they were able to work with Hector who spoke no English.  After a quick but delicious lunch provided by Elizabeth the team decided that the first priority was to finish moving the blocks so that the B+Team wouldn't have to the next day.  With frequent water breaks the job got done while Pastor Joel convinced Ernie to take the motorcycle with him to the hardware store to buy the rest of the supplies for the roof.  Ernie said that the ride wasn't too bad but his eyes were closed so it is difficult to tell.  Once the blocks were safely on the roof, Elizabeth told Jen that her cousin was having heart palpitations (by tapping rapidly on her chest) and that she wasn't feeling well. Jen felt her pulse and took her blood pressure to find that her pressure was on the low side, but with some additional water she started feeling better.  Elizabeth mentioned that she drank a lot of coffee. Jen was able to explain that she was drinking too much coffee and too little water. Little Davey then opened up a clinic for the team where he took everyone's blood pressure and gave them the appropriate diagnosis.

Meanwhile the B+Team (Sue, Ray, David, Corey) was off to the preschool and Wilson's grandmother's village.  They were excited to find that one of the newborns that Corey and Jen met the first year was now a healthy and funny 3 year old.  The village quickly brought out chairs and gathered around praising God while the team handed out jump ropes, tylonol, reading glasses , rubber bracelets, vitamins, balls, and other supplies.  The next stop was the preschool where everyone enjoyed making necklaces and bracelets...and activity in which Ray excelled. Professor Linda was so excited to see us she shared that she had been praying for us since our last visit so that we would not forget about the children in this poor village. We plan on going back Friday to watch Spanish bible movies with the kids.  After the school, the van stopped at a hardware store and office supply to get whiteboards and supplies for the next day.

At the hardware store with Pastor Joel, Ernie decided that riding back on the motorcycle wasn't the best idea, so he arranged to have B+Team pick them up on the way back  After some wrap up work we finally called it a day. With two walls standing at Pastor Joel's and all of the material in place we felt good about our progress and Thanked God for all the great work we were able to do.

Day 4 - The Longest Day

The day started very similar to the day before, Wilson was miraculously early so we piled in and headed to Pastor Joel's house.

Hector and Ramonzeto were already hard at work on the third wall when we arrived.  Everyone was excited to find that David could speak french to Hector making the project much easier to understand.  B+Team got to work moving the fill with pots and pans from the kitchen while A-Team waved goodbye on their way to the mountain school.

The trip to the long dirt road that leads to the mountain school went by quick and soon the A-Team made it to the school. When we first entered the students appeared skeptical but once they understood that we were giving out balls and supplies they quickly became very excited that we were there. We had footballs to hand out and the children were confused as to what to do with such an oddly shaped ball, but once we showed them how to throw it, they were very happy and started playing catch with us. We spoke with the teacher, Jose, who said he was doing well and was very happy. It was great to hear that he was "muy contento." He explained to the children in spanish that God was great and then asked us to pray for the children.

After we had handed out all our supplies and played for a bit, we were on our way back down the mountain - with students from the school running after us. We passed the clinic, but it was closed - the people in the village told us the doctor wasn't showing up consistently  We made it to our "family in the mountains" and they were extremely excited to see us. We had a bag of supplies specifically for them - some clothes, blankets, toys and school supplies. We had a look around their house and the mother told us that the roof on their house needed to be replaced. There were holes all over the roof and she said when it rains, it rains in the house. After a quick huddle and prayer we decided right then and there that we would do what we could to help fix that. After we said our goodbyes to the family, we headed down the rocky road to our "painter family." They were also pleased to see us. We brought the boys a new ball and gave the mother a few trinkets and pain medicine. We were about to leave and someone came up with a bottle of Coca-Cola they had just purchased, so we stayed for a little longer as they went to the effort to entertain their guests. After we chatted a bit longer we prayed for the family, the A-team was on their way back to Pastor Joel's to see what the B+Team was up to.

We were so impressed with the progress that we may need to give B+Team a new name.  They had worked hard in the new garden, moving fill and topsoil. Corey fought off a snake but they told us they weren't any poisonous snacks on the island. Ray and Dave  removed brush and garbage that had been there for years. As they threw it over the fence another family was there and scavenging it for anything they could use.

They had met a new friend Eddie who spoke English and jumped right in to help. Before long we had the fill done and an inch of topsoil on it too. While they had been waiting for the next delivery we shared food and prayers with the workers, (avocado, chicken and rice) We used lots of sunscreen and drank lots of water. After lunch the children grabbed pots and pans and everyone worked together. Dave enjoyed leading the children like the pied piper to the ice cream store. Many of the kids had never had ice cream and as they ate it so slowly Sue and Dave worried that parents might be getting nervous about us being gone so long. Christopher told people Sue was his Aunt and parents seemed fine with the outing.

Sue enjoyed going to the plant store and getting Elizabeth some nice flowers and vegetable plants that she had been wanting but could never plant before. Elizabeth explained that the garden would be a wonderful place to pray with the church members that visit and it would help her find a little tranquility when things seemed over whelming.

Dinner was on the run and we were off to the Preschool for a movie "The Miracles of Jesus" in Spanish . We were late but as the taxi made the corner and we could hear the children cheer. How exciting to be able to enjoy their first movie experience with them. We brought a snack of cookies and apple juice. It was dark and there was no electricity so as Ben and Corey and Helen pored juice with the lights from their phones Wilson turned the taxi around and we all shared a snack  in the the light from the the taxi. Great Night!

When we got back to the hotel they treated us to dinner at a Steak Restaurant  after seeing the meat hanging outside Ray was the only one brave enough to try it. We had seafood and chicken and lots of salad.

Day 5 - Chaos in Higuey

Today we were up early with our bags packed  we stopped at Pastor Joel's to check on the progress and speak to Hector and Ramonizeto. David came to the rescue with his French.  We were entertained by the neighborhood kids that were anxious to show us the snake they had trapped in a soda bottle.

Back in the van, we were off to Higuey and Wilson's neighborhood.  The members of the team who had been last year were astonished to find how much work had been done on Wilson's house.  He had finished the cistern and built walls for an entry way, living room and kitchen.  In the back of the house where there used to be a pile of garbage and compost was now a nice garden with chairs and banana trees.  As soon as everyone sat down the children of the neighborhood made a mad rush for the school supplies.

We had some shoe boxes with gifts and letters that the kids from Second Baptist had written. We gave everything out and encouraged them to write letters back. Jen got a hold of a two month old baby girl named Stephanie who was passed to her through the barbed wire. Jen found clothes for her and many other small babies. When Stephanie was hungry Jen tried to hand the baby back but instead the mother handed her a bottle.

Helen visited with the families from last year, and Corey was excited to see two new born puppies that Wilson's dog Susie had a week ago. Ben was our official translator jumping right in with the medical supplies and took the time to speak to older women who had been in a motorcycle accident and was going to need additional surgeries. We did not have to go far, we just had to open our eyes and heart to see the work God put in front of us.

Soon after we arrived a truck from the Good Samaritan Hospital in La Romana delivered the bio-filters that had been donated by the Rotary Club of Suffield.  David, Scott and Ray helped and learned the installation of the filter for Wilson and we loaded the other in the van to install at Pastor Joel and Elisabeth's.  Overall we are very impressed with the ease of setup and maintenance for the filters.  It takes two days to prime the filters so we weren't able to sample the water but if this test goes well we are excited to grow this part of our mission.  Potable water is one of the biggest expenses for a family so they often have the difficult decision on which water is good enough to drink.

Lunch was a delicious with homemade french fries, chicken and canned spaghetti that Amarilli made us. With all of the kids around everyone lost track of time so we broke into two groups one went to purchase roof supplies and to the pharmacy and explored the area with the children.  Corey, Ben and Helen even stopped in a few to talk to the families and determine the need.

Once the group was back together it was much later then planned but we decided a quick stop at Macao (our first look at the ocean) would help us relax.

After a quick dinner we were off to church. Pastor Joel's new church is in a small store front but once inside the beautiful decorations that Elizabeth had worked on all day made us feel at home. Pastor Joel had asked us earlier if we would sing for the church.  So we practiced "This Little Light of Mine" in the van throughout the day.  David and Scott (choir veterans) helped us jazz it up with individual parts and motions. Don't worry, there is a video! The service was very meaningful and Pastor Joel surprised us by having a friend of his translate the entire sermon.  We were truly honored to be part of this new church. At the end of the services the members were thrilled to receive the bibles we brought with the help of the Smith family.

It was 10 pm but we still had one last job to do.  The filter needed to be installed at Pastor Joels.  Even though we were tired everyone worked quickly to install the filter and explain how to use it.  11 pm we were back at the hotel.  One long day!!!

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Day 6 - How Many Batptists Does it Take?

The plan was to treat Sunday as the day of rest and invite Pastor Joel and Wilson's family to come to our hotel for a visit. We were successful in inviting them but the relaxing part proved illusive.

They arrived at 9:15 and we all headed right to breakfast.  The kids were full of excitement and ready for fun. The day turned out to be a great opportunity to sit down and talk to Pastor Joel and Elizabeth about their hopes and ideas for the church and the new classroom. They explained that there is a lot of need in their congregation but the numbers are growing. We asked how we could best continue to help going forward.  We all decided that the most important thing we need to do was stay in better communication.  Facebook was selected as the best solution with each of us should attempt to translate into the other language.  We also agreed that both Pastor Joel and Wilson would upload photos of the construction every day until it was complete.

The beach is about a 10 minute walk from the pool but that didn't stop the children from constantly wanting to switch from one to the other.  Elizabeth and Pastor Joel took a nice peaceful walk, Wilson crashed in Ernie and Ben's room to relax and watch TV.

For our last full day Wilson had offered to let us go Zip Lining with one of his friends but after a quick group meeting we decided to pool our left over personal money and make a trip out to Hoya Clara to see how the farming supplies and seeds that were brought in August worked out.

At the end of the evening after many trips to the buffet we all got together for one last discussion about what we were able to accomplish and what we still needed to get done.  Long after the discussion was over we refused to stop the conversation in an attempt to delay the inevitable goodbyes.

Seeing the children's smiling faces out the window waving and blowing kisses as they drove away is a moment that will stay with us for a long time.

Day 7

In order to get out to Hoya Clara we had to have an early start so it was good that Wilson's friend arrived right at 8 and we were on the road by 8:15 taxi to Pastor Joel's house.

After a quick inspection of the job site we were off to Hoya Clara but first a quick stop for food for the four families. Our friend and guide Carlos was one of the truck drivers that came.  He grew up and has family in Hoya Clara so we relied on him to tell us what the families needed most.  There are four large families that live out there so we made sure to buy four bags of rice, dried milk, salami , sugar, coffee, beans and oil. Carlos and Pastor Joel thought that the market we were at took charge cards but, surprise, no charge.  The team pooled our cash and we piled into the trucks to Hoya Clara. The closest family area is only five miles off road but it took an hour in the two trucks. Heading there was a real adventure as we were tossed about like a sneaker in the dryer.

The men in the back of one truck serenaded us with songs from the past which helped pass the time on the steep ride in the hot sun. On our way, in the middle of the lush landscape, a church appeared where Carlos' Mom went when she was a child. The church building is still used on Sundays but the Sunday School building is in rough shape and hasn't been used for years.  The entire area was covered in a short grass that doesn't need to be mowed and its existence in the middle of this harsh terrain gave it a peaceful almost surreal presence.

After another 20 minutes we arrived at the foot of a hill where we parked the trucks and started off on foot with all of our supplies. Carlos shouted out our arrival and a few of the men came to help.  It was a 10 to 15 minute walk over steep coral paths but the scene that greeted us was well worth the effort.

The entire camp was surrounded by large fields of beans; the same beans that our team brought it August.  God is great! Where there had once been an unsuccessful Yucca crop was now a healthy cash crop that would single handedly be able to sustain the family for more than 10 months.  Carlos explained that each of the thousands of seeds had been hand planted by the family that lived there by pressing their finger into the soil, placing the seed and covering it.

Once inside the camp we were greeted by all four of the families many of which we had met on previous trips.  Everyone helped divide the food, medicine, and school supplies between the families while the kids enjoyed the candy we handed out.

The groups happiness was tampered when we discovered that one of the women we had met last January had given birth to a baby who is now seven months old but was born three months premature leading to severe neurological problems causing the baby to have little control over his body.  At one year's old he will need an operation on his hernia and medicine for his spasms.  Even with the best medical attention the child's life will be a difficult one.  Jen was able to provide the mother with some much needed relief by caring for him while we were there.

After the supplies were given out we were treated to a lunch of yucca and spaghetti, which we all enjoyed.  It is difficult to express the wonderful calm in this place that time forgot, it was  peaceful and authentic.  They have no electricity, no running water, and no plumbing and yet none of us wanted to leave you could feel God’s presence.

The dirt road we took out started with a steep rocky descent but was pretty flat after that.  This meant that on our way out the hardest part of the trip would be right at the end.  The second larger truck we had planned on using had broken down so we were forced to borrow a small two wheel drive Mazda pickup.  The diesel Toyota climbed the hill with no problem but the smaller pickup only made it half way before stalling out in a pile of boulders.  The people in the back jumped out of the vehicle and Carlos who was driving the bigger truck backed down the hill where some of the men used some old rope to tie the trucks together.  The rope didn't last long before snapping but it did its job before it broke.  We were able to make it the rest of the way with some team pushing.  After almost 20 min of work both trucks finally made it up the hill and we were on our way to Pastor Joel's. Many prayers as we made that trip up the hill.

Some of Pastor Joel and Elizabeth's friends and neighbors had been working on the garden while we were gone.  Where sharp coral and scrap metal had been was now a grassy yard where the kids could safely play.  Hector and his workmen had also been hard at work, the walls were all standing and they had made significant progress in the final coat of cement.

The long day spent in the hot sun had taken its toll on the group so we all climbed back into the trucks for the trip back to the hotel.  Soon after we arrived back we met with some Haitian refugees who Sue and Jen had met with on another trip.  We had bought them some rice, beans and oil as well as medical supplies that the children very much needed.

As a final dinner together we had made a reservation at the Mexican restaurant at the hotel.  We gathered around the table and although we would be sad to go we are all excited to get home. God had allowed us to do so many things that we had not planned for. He had a plan for us!

Tomorrow will be a day to pack and catch up on writing and pictures.  We will also say goodbye to Pastor Joel and Wilson.  We are proud of what were were able to accomplish, getting even closer to our Dominican family, building a classroom and garden for the new church, a roof for Wilson that will survive a hurricane, a new roof for the mountain family, school supplies for two schools, relief for they adults, joy for the children, subsistence for a remote village and a light of hope to those in need.

A big “Thank you” for everyone who made this trip possible.